Trip Reflection

Introduction

In using the What, So What, Now What model, I’d like to take a moment to reflect a little on the trip portion of the summer, the IARD 4010 two week journey around Chiapas. Which pretty much changed my life, as I now have a new appreciation for the following: Mexican food (obviously some of the best on the planet); agricultural practices; and development perspectives that distance themselves from international comparison.

What

We spent a little more than two weeks from June 1 – June 18, 2912, visiting NGOs, farmers, communities, development sites, government leaders, and schools. Our objectives were to increase our familiarity with the rural infrastructure, development, sustainable business models, and agricultural productions, among many others emerging and developed market systems.

The trip itself I remember as seamless, with tight coordination between the leadership and student body, so that we always knew where we were going, when we had to be there, and what we were going to be doing. I also appreciated the fact that the entire experience was translated for me from Spanish to English, but in such a way that I never felt left out of anything, nor did I think that I was missing out by not speaking Spanish. I wished that I had been fluent, but it didn’t impact my trip learning experience that I wasn’t fluent, thanks to the amazing staff on the trip, and helpful friends.
Some of the highlights for me included visiting indigenous women and learning how they make their livelihood through weaving. I got married at this particular juncture in the trip, as I participated in a traditional indigenous ceremony… but it was quickly annulled. Not without a bit of posh to help smooth things over though, however. :)

I was also grateful for the chance to connect with a wide variety of disciplines while on this trip, as I was exposed to agriculture, government, entomology, agroforestry, economics, literature, and languages. Each day felt like I was completely immersed in one of the richest learning experiences I can think of.

**So What**

This trip really made a difference in my perspective on education, my outlook on development, and my own personal growth. I couldn’t help but think how fortunate I am to have had an educational experience like this one, where I am able to leave the U.S. and see what it’s like in other place for awhile. To learn about people’s lives, their governments, their communities, and what makes their lives work where they live.

I grew up a lot on this trip, definitely. I grew up and out—out of my ethnocentric eyes, where I constantly compare things to what I already know. Out of my comfort zone, out of the skin I live in. I made friends on this trip that I can’t imagine my life without now, as we went through some of the best weeks of our lives together. I mean, two or more hours on a bus every day together will do that anyway, but ours was an experience we decided to build together, so it would last longer.

**Now What**

I’d have to say that I would encourage any student, any day, to take this trip on. To jump in with their heads, as their learning will be pushed and stretched, but to
encourage everyone to jump in with their whole heart. As it takes a lot of heart to see the things we saw. Beggars on streets, children without breakfast, governments that don’t adhere to democracy. You have to have heart because judgment doesn’t have a place, as remember, you have to leave your old eyes at home. The eyes where you compare with what you know, and let guide your experience. Leave them, because there’s nothing to compare--you have to simply be still and learn and see where you fit into the whole process of structural change.

Conclusion

Lastly, I guess I just want to express my gratitude, which is the main thing I feel when I think about this trip. Grateful for the opportunity, for the arrangements that were made for me to go, for the chance to meet so many unforgettable people and see so many unforgettable things. Thanks to everyone who made it possible.